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SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH UPDATES CODEL INOUE ON SYRIAN
CONTEMPLATION OF LEAVING IRAN'S ORBIT

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (S) CODEL Inouye accompanied by Ambassador met with King Abdullah on November 28 and discussed developments in Iraq, the Annapolis meeting and a potential opportunity to change Syrian behavior. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Senators Daniel Inouye and Ted Stevens, Ambassador, and Minority Staff Director of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Sid Ashworth, met with King Abdullah on November 28. The King was joined by newly-named Chief of the Royal Court Bassem Awadallah and General Intelligence Director LtG Mohammad Dahabi.

Iraq

¶3. (C) The CODEL updated the King on their visit to Iraq, describing as "encouraging" the results of the security surge. The CODEL commended Jordan for its assistance to U.S. efforts in Anbar and elsewhere in Iraq. The King expressed his appreciation for the aid and support given Jordan by the USG, and Awadallah appealed for expanded economic support in FY09, in the form of an increase in Jordan's "baseline" assistance, which he described as important in helping meet the burdens of the large Iraqi presence in Jordan.

Annapolis

¶4. (C) The King noted the positive outcome of the Annapolis meeting, and shared his concern that lower-level Palestinian and Israeli officials lack the trust that exists between PM Olmert and President Abbas. The King emphasized that progress was essential within the next three months, stressing the importance of the U.S. role and the presumed attractiveness to Israel of peace with 57 Muslim countries.

Syria and Iran

¶5. (S) The King told Ambassador and CODEL that "Asad knocked on my door" - referring to what precipitated the King's November 18 visit to Damascus. The King said he had agreed to go only after Asad categorically assured his emissary that he wanted to shift his losing strategic position and move out of the Iranian orbit. While the King noted approvingly Syria's participation at Annapolis, he stressed the need to hold Syria to its commitments and to ensure that Syria proves by its actions that Asad is truly undertaking a new direction. The King said Asad "must act on my list" (note: of necessary actions, end note), the best indicator of which would be evicting Hamas leader Khalid Mish'al by the end of

the year. King Abdullah told the CODEL that he had asked Asad: how can you have a relationship with me so long as Mish'al is threatening me and Jordan from Syria?

¶16. (S) GID Director Dahabi reported that he went to Damascus the night of November 27 to meet with his Syrian counterpart. He said that the Jordanians are seeing changes in Syrian policy and a developing split with Iran. The demonstrations at the Jordanian Embassy in Tehran against Annapolis were "not an accident," according to Dahabi, noting that, while Ahmedinejad attacked Annapolis, Syria attended.

¶17. (S) King Abdullah added that "neutralizing" Syria would cause Iran's regional strategy to fall apart, because it would lose easy access to Hamas and Hizballah. The King described himself as "only cautiously optimistic," saying that "Asad seems to have made the decision to move away from Iran, but we all need to keep the pressure on." If this were played right, the King continued, it could have a very positive impact on the situation in Iraq by disrupting the flow of foreign fighters through Syria.

¶18. (U) CODEL Inouye did not have the opportunity to clear this message prior to departure from Jordan.

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Hale